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ABSTRACT

This speech discusses the roles of the superintendent and the chief personnel administrator. The author describes and then applies these roles to (1) employment and placement, (2) evaluation and followup, (3) collective bargaining, and (4) administrative leadership development. The author stresses the importance of the superintendent and the chief personnel administrator working together as a team. A related document is EA 004 197. (JF)

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The Superintendent and His Chief Personnel Administrator: Putting It All Together

(Dana P. Whitmer)

Dr. Horvath, ladies and gentlemen . . .

It is a real pleasure to have the opportunity this afternoon, to participate in the consideration of this vital topic. As is recognized a little later on in my presentation, the impact of the chief personnel administrator and his department, has very great significance to the quality and success of the entire school district enterprise. Thus, our topic today is an important one and I believe it to be appropriate that this meeting is co-sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators and the American Association of School Personnel Administrators.

The presentation which I will make this afternoon might be sub-titled AS I SEE IT, for it has been prepared from the viewpoint and from the experience of a school superintendent in a middle sized urban district. I am sure that the experiences of a superintendent in a very large city, or in a suburban community, or in a small rural district are so different that the views expressed by any one of them would have to be adapted, and modified to have general applicability. Let me start by presenting three basic propositions having to do with the role of the superintendent and that of the chief personnel administrator. They can form a framework for thinking about specific concepts and issues which relate to personnel administration.

Proposition 1. The Superintendent of Schools has ultimate responsibility for all of the major activities of a school district. He must answer for these to the Board of Education—he must answer to the public—and his stewardship is judged by the effectiveness of these activities in the school district. The superintendent knows that he will be measured

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on the basis of the success—the achievement of mediocrity or the failure of the schools with respect to the major school district activities. This fact colors, and to an extent governs, the perception which will be expressed as I sketch out the relationship between the superintendent and the chief personnel administrator.

Proposition 2. The output of the personnel department has a very great significance for the success of the entire school district enterprise. What is the most important factor in good learning? It is the teacher. What is the most important factor for a successful transportation system? It is the bus driver. What is the most important factor for creating an outstanding school? It is the principal. One could go on down the list, concluding that it is the people of the school district that are most important to the success of any of its programs. In any attempt to identify those school district activities which have the highest priority, certainly the work of the chief personnel administrator and his department must be included.

Proposition 3. An effective relationship between the superintendent and the chief personnel administrator requires that they work together as a team, in a cooperative way, but that certain decisions must be made by the superintendent. Certain decisions must belong to the chief personnel administrator. And these must be clearly understood by both.

It follows from these three propositions that the superintendent is responsible for the establishment of policy, goals, and guidelines for the activities of the personnel department and its chief administrator. Of course, the policies and goals may be developed by the department but the superintendent must assume final responsibility for confirming these or modifying them. It is the chief personnel administrator's responsibility to devise, direct and maintain the operational activities of the department so as to achieve those goals.

And it is of greatest importance that the personnel administrator must be given adequate authority to carry out his operational responsibilities. He must have the backing and support of the superintendent in so doing. The evaluation—the assignment—the discipline —the dismissal—and the solving of people problems are difficult and emotionally charged activities. The chief personnel administrator must be in a strong position to be effective in dealing with these problems. People must know that he does have full support from the superintendent.

The general point of view which has been described puts emphasis on the importance of the interrelationship of the superintendent and the chief personnel administrator if the goal of "putting it all together" is to be achieved. The remainder of this presentation will be devoted to the application of this general point of view to several typical kinds of personnel department activities with the hope that the general concepts will thus be clarified and sharpened.

Employment and Placement

There was a time, not too many years ago, when the general guideline followed in employing personnel was to select the most highly qualified and promising person that the available dollars would permit you to attract. This guideline set a clear direction for the chief personnel administrator and thus was an adequate and useful employment policy. Of course there were some subtle pressures that the chief personnel administrator faced even in those days. The mayor's daughter for instance, might find it easier to be hired as a teacher than some of the other applicants—especially if the mayor appointed members of the school board. The pressures which were experienced then tended to be local, to be individual, and quite different from the kinds of the legal and governmental constraints that are faced today. Today, new questions illustrated by the three which follow, are

facing all school districts with reference to employment and placement. These are questions which are part of the broad movement of social change in America, questions which are potentially controversial, and questions which are emotionally laden.

1. What staff composition standards should be achieved in a school faculty or in the school district with reference to the race or the sex or the age of employees?

2. How can a chief personnel administrator hold on to the idea of hiring the best applicant and, at the same time, comply with standards concerning race, age, or sex in the composition of staff.

3. To what degree, if any, should parents or lay persons participate in the selection of teachers, or principals, or other school personnel?

The chief personnel administrator must have the direction of a policy framework regarding these and similar questions if he is to be in a position to do his job well. The superintendent, therefore, must assume responsibility for the development of such policy framework and have it approved by the Board of Education. This policy framework must be workable and it must be relevant to conditions in the area served by the school district. Once developed and implemented, it becomes the further responsibility of the superintendent to back up and support the chief personnel administrator as he works within this framework.

Evaluation and Follow-up

The concept that school districts should periodically evaluate employees who have been around a long time recognizes that schools need the services of good people, and that a person whose performance is not adequate, should either be dismissed, or required to engage in a program of self-improvement. With the increase in the costs of education, the higher salaries that teachers and administrators are receiving, and the general demand for quality in student achievement, more is expected of schools and school personnel than

ever before. Thus, the pressure to evaluate personnel and to follow-up with appropriate action grows more and more important. An effective evaluation program is both essential for educational success and generally demanded by the public.

There are two roles for the superintendent in the staff evaluation function. First, he has responsibility to see that there is an appropriate policy framework under which an adequate evaluation program can be established and operated. The framework must include Board of Education policy as well as administrative policy and procedure. Secondly, the superintendent should hear and act on appeals by individuals to their evaluation after the case has proceeded through the steps of appeal which are provided in board policy or in the negotiated agreement. The superintendent should be careful to avoid being drawn into the process of evaluation until all steps of appeal have been followed. This is difficult at times because there are always pressures upon the superintendent to get involved in certain cases each year and these are pressures which must be resisted.

The chief personnel administrator has a complicated and time consuming task in developing an evaluation system in conformity with board policy or the negotiated agreement. He must train people to use the system, he must monitor the system, and he must hear appeals from individuals. The training of middle management personnel to operate an evaluation program is difficult today for it involves knowledge about and understanding of due process requirements, of keeping adequate written records, of keeping staff persons fully informed about their performance—all of which are activities that are more demanding than the informal practices of the past with which most people are familiar. A significant aspect of the chief personnel administrator's responsibility occurs when an evaluation points to the need for improvement by a staff person and the need to develop, implement, and monitor an improvement program. It becomes more apparent because of the growth of

collective bargaining in public schools that an evaluation system is inadequate if it fails to provide for help to a teacher whose performance is not satisfactory.

Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining, or professional negotiations, is a new phenomenon which has made great changes in the relationships between the personnel of the school district and its administrative staff. The significance of these new relationships might be illustrated by three developments.

1. Many issues formerly thought of as matters of board policy, are now being settled in collective bargaining. In Michigan, where collective bargaining follows a labor model, the length of the teacher's day, the length of faculty meetings, procedures used in the reduction of personnel, and class size, are all bargainable issues. The final determination of school policy with respect to these, and other matters like them, is reached not through deliberations by the administrative staff and Board of Education, but rather across the bargaining table.

2. The preservation of authority by the Board of Education so that it can discharge its legal obligations and respond to its constituency, has been severly challenged in negotiations. For example, contractural provisions calling for the arbitration of personnel problems, the authority of teachers to determine the instructional program, or mandatory participation by employee groups in financial planning are being presented at the bargaining table as legitimate bargainable issues.

3. The costs of salary and fringe settlements with employee groups which approaches nearly 90% of the total operating budgets in some school districts, represent a major financial decision which is made at the bargaining table.

These illustrations serve to underscore the importance of negotiations for the superintendent and the chief personnel administrator. It is felt that negotiations should be conducted by the chief personnel administrator, or by a member of the personnel department under his guidance. The superintendent should be held in reserve during the normal course of negotiations for those critical times when an impasse has been reached or conclusive bargaining on a salary settlement is about to occur. The general role of the superintendent in bargaining is to set parameters within which the personnel department conducts negotiations. These parameters are financial, they should deal with questions of basic Board of Education authority, and with important personnel policy matters. Within this framework then, the negotiators are free to reach agreements. If the parameters have to be breached to reach agreements, there must be prior consultation with the superintendent and possibly the Board of Education. The superintendent must also consult periodically with the chief personnel administrator concerning the status of negotiations and the development of strategy. He must also keep the Board of Education informed concerning the progress of negotiations.

The Development of Administrative Leadership

Human talent is the greatest resource of a school district. The talent of the teaching staff, as mentioned before, is the most important factor for quality learning and the leadership talent in the administrative staff is the most important factor for the achievement of quality in the total range of programs and services of the school system. It is of extreme importance, in a school district, that talent be discovered—or perhaps uncovered—and that this talent be developed and be available for administrative appointment as needed.

Who is responsible for the development of leadership talent in a school district? I'm sure that practices vary greatly among school districts, but suggest that this responsibility must be shared by the superintendent and the chief personnel administrator in the kind of interrelationship which has already been described. Programs to develop administrative potential become the responsibility of the personnel department within the policy guidelines developed under the leadership of the superintendent.

Time does not permit consideration of the varied kinds of developmental programs that are useful, but let me sketch out one rather simple plan that has been successful in the schools of Pontiac, Michigan.

1. A Management Training Course has been conducted periodically for teachers with leadership interest and potential, and for administrators who wish to upgrade their leadership qualification.

2. The course was conducted in 10 three hour sessions held on Saturday mornings.

3. Michigan State University has cooperated in sponsoring the course which carried two hours of graduate credit.

4. Most of the sessions were taught by staff members of the school district.

5. Each session of the course was used for consideration of one to three problems or activities of the school district such as

   a) The administrator's role in improving instruction.

   b) Research and evaluation in the school district.

   c) Concepts of leadership.

   d) The administrator's role in conflict resolution.

   e) Minority groups in a student population.

6. Workshop participants were evaluated by the administrative staff at the conclusion of the course. Individual administrators were then counselled by members of the administrative staff with reference to their plans for further development.

There are many kinds of activities which are useful in the development of the talents of people. The most important responsibility is, however, to do something—to assess leadership needs of the district—and to establish programs to meet these.

School Principals and Staff Personnel Administration

An earlier reference was made to the important role played by principals in the evaluation of personnel. The point that principals have an important role to play in personnel administration is important and deserves some further emphasis. Think for a moment of how deeply school principals are involved in these personnel administration activities—

1. The evaluation of building staff.
2. The supervision of building staff.
3. Understanding and implementing provisions of the master agreement in working with staff and in operating the school.
4. The handling of personnel grievances.
5. The handling of personal problems of the staff

and all of us in this room could mention many more.

What are the implications of this involvement by principals? Certainly, principals must know and understand what their obligations are in their interrelationship with building personnel. In addition they must know and understand the school district procedures that have been established for handling personnel matters. This then points up an important responsibility for the chief personnel administrator—to make plans which are designed

to acquaint principals with these obligations so that they can effectively discharge their responsibilities. Such plans might well include formal training sessions, issuance of written materials, a system for monitoring the personnel activities of principals, conferring with principals about specific issues, and others. Experience has shown that the degree of success experienced by principals in discharging their personnel administration responsibilities is related to the degree of involvement they have had in development of these plans and procedures. This is old hat! If principals are to help in administering the teachers' negotiated contract, they should be represented on the team that does the negotiating. And this goes as well for other personnel activities. The point here is that personnel administration involves many administrators and the development of the "leadership team" concept is an important ingredient in making administrative policies work well. The chief personnel administrator has a significant role to play here.

Conclusion

Our program theme, "The Superintendent and His Chief Personnel Administrator: Putting It All Together," represents a goal which pays big dividends for the quality of a school system. To accomplish this goal, it seems important that the superintendent and his chief personnel administrator

1. Have clearly defined roles which have been thoughtfully developed.
2. Know and understand these roles.
3. Develop general policies and specific operating procedures.
4. Work together as a team.
5. Utilize the administrative staff in a "management team" mode

and in so doing, can indeed, "put it all together."